No fruit defines a season more than a pumpkin. It is only available fresh during the fall season and is synonymous with Halloween and Thanksgiving, with jack-o-lanterns and pumpkin pies. To think “pumpkin” is to think cooler weather and diminishing daylight.

The pumpkin is definitely a fruit of mystery—from its unusual appearance to its unique, savory flavor. Perhaps the greatest mystery, though, is why more people don’t use fresh ones for cooking. The taste is well worth the trouble involved and that trouble is slight; it’s no more complicated than cooking fresh winter squash.

Buying and Cooking a Pumpkin

When buying, choose smaller pumpkins, as their flesh is more tender and succulent. A 4-pound pumpkin will yield about 4 1/2 cups cubed, cooked or 4 cups mashed, cooked pumpkin. To cook fresh pumpkin, here’s all you do: cut the pumpkin in half vertically, then discard seeds and stringy pulp. Place pumpkin, cut sides down, in a large, shallow baking dish. Add water to a depth of 1/2 inch. Bake at 350°F. for 1 hour or until pumpkin is crisp-tender when pierced with a fork. Cool. (The pumpkin should be tender enough to mash, yet firm enough to handle when cut into cubes.) Cut each half into wedges and peel. Use pumpkin according to recipe instructions. Acorn or butternut squash may be substituted for fresh pumpkin.

Maple-Roasted Squash and Pumpkin

1 large acorn squash (about 1 3/4 lb.)
1 small pumpkin (about 2 1/2 lb.)
Vegetable cooking spray
1/3 cup maple syrup
1 1/2 Tbsp margarine, melted
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 tsp salt

Cut squash and pumpkin in half vertically; discard seeds and membranes. Cut each into 8 wedges. Place wedges in 13 x 9-inch baking dish coated with cooking spray. Drizzle syrup and margarine over wedges, sprinkle with sugar and salt. Bake at 400°F. for 45 minutes or until tender and lightly browned, turning wedges every 15 minutes.
**Pumpkin Recipes**

### Pumpkin-Pecan Bread

- 3 1/2 cups flour
- 2 tsp baking soda
- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp nutmeg
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup oil
- 4 eggs (or 8 egg whites or egg substitute equivalent to 4 eggs)
- 2/3 cup water
- 2 cups pumpkin
- 1 cup chopped pecans

Sift together the flour, soda, salt, cinnamon and nutmeg. Add sugar and stir to mix thoroughly. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and add all at once the oil, eggs, water and pumpkin. Mix well and add the nuts. Pour batter into four 8 x 4-inch loaf pans, filling each 1/2 full. Bake at 350°F. for one hour, or until a wooden toothpick inserted in the center of the loaf comes out clean. *Yields 4 loaves (16 slices each); approximately 85 calories/serving (1 slice).*

### Pumpkin Muffins

- 2 1/4 cups oat-bran cereal
- 3 Tbsp brown sugar
- 1 Tbsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/4 cup raisins
- 1/2 cup pumpkin
- 1/2 cup frozen pineapple juice concentrate (or substitute with orange concentrate)
- 3/4 cup evaporated skim milk
- 2 Tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 egg whites

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl. Mix all other ingredients in a blender. Combine with the dry ingredients and stir just to mix. Line the muffin pans with paper baking cups. Fill the cups 2/3 full with batter and bake for 17 minutes or until a wooden toothpick comes out dry. *Yields 12 muffins.*

### Blender Pumpkin Pie

- 2 cups pumpkin
- 1 can (12 oz) evaporated skim milk
- 2 eggs
- 1/2 cup low-fat buttermilk baking mix
- 18 packets sugar substitute
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 1 pkg (.92 oz) no-sugar-added whipped topping mix

Spray a 9-inch glass pie plate with a non-stick vegetable coating. Place pumpkin, milk, eggs, baking mix, sugar substitute, cloves, cinnamon and vanilla into a blender, food processor or mixing bowl. Blend one minute or beat 2 minutes with mixer. Pour into prepared pie plate. Rotating dish several times during cooking, microwave on 50 percent (medium) 15-20 minutes, or until the center jiggles only slightly. Let stand 15-20 minutes. Prepare whipped topping and spread on cooled pie. *Yield 8 servings; 140 calories/serving.*